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NEWS RELEASE

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ALL IS FAIR IN LOVE AND WAR

by Senator Larry Craig

We recently celebrated the anniversary of the birth of our nation – a nation that sets the standard for freedom of expression and freedom of the press, celebrating a diversity of political thought and debate. The suppression of those inherent freedoms led our Founding Fathers to declare these “united Colonies . . . Absolved from all Allegiance to the British Crown.”

In the 1940s, the federal government instituted a policy called the Fairness Doctrine. This policy required public broadcasters to give equal representation of opposing viewpoints on controversial issues. The first and most obvious problem with the policy was the fact that the government was intervening in political thought – an intervention that has no place in a free society. However, to make matters worse, the regulation had the opposite effect of its stated goal. Rather than encourage debate, the Fairness Doctrine stifled it. Station owners, seeking to limit liability, steered clear of broadcasting any opinions.

It took the FCC decades to right the wrong. During the Reagan Administration, the FCC finally overturned the rule, justifying it by stating the obvious, that a “multiplicity of voices in the marketplace” make it obsolete, and that the Doctrine stifles debate.

Twenty years later, we have seen an explosion in the “multiplicity of voices in the marketplace.” Just think about where we get our news these days. I, for one, get my daily news from newspapers, radio programs, websites, wire services, trade publications, newsletters, and broadcast and cable stations. In fact, the term “daily news” might not even be applicable anymore. In many ways, it might be more appropriate to say “hourly news.”

Why am I concerned about a government regulation that has been off the books for twenty years? Well, every now and then some thin-skinned politicians get upset about comments on talk radio. Recently, some of those politicians have suggested that we reinstitute the Fairness Doctrine. Over the past few weeks, I have been the target of some tongue lashings from talk radio about my stance on solving our immigration woes. While I disagree with talk radio in this case, this is America. This isn't China, Cuba, North Korea, Iran, or Venezuela. In America, we celebrate a diversity of views. We celebrate public debate. In fact, that is one reason people flock to our country – to enjoy those very freedoms.

Reinstituting the Fairness Doctrine is an overreaction. Rather than squash the dialogue, politicians should relish the fact that the debate is occurring and is able to occur. In this day and age, when voter participation in the United States languishes at historic lows and citizens of other countries

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fear death for voicing their political views, we need to step back and allow citizens to air their opinions. To push for renewing the Fairness Doctrine is not only unwise, but few responses, if any, are more un-American.

Congress needs to set current policy in stone by passing the Broadcaster Freedom Act of 2007. We need to take a hands-off approach to political debate on our airwaves. That is why I am proud to be an original cosponsor of this legislation.

Two hundred and thirty-one years ago, our forefathers risked their lives to express their opinion to the Crown and declare our independence. They didn't do that to create a government that stifles debate. They recognized the value of a vibrant public discourse. We need to do the same.